

Pam Home m. 108

America's Supreme and Urgent Need

By Bishop Joseph F. Berry

AMERICA has some urgent needs just now. She needs ships, and weapons, and munitions, and a great trained army, and a patriotism which shall burn with intenser devotion as the days pass by.

But we have other needs. We need a clearer vision of God. We need to grip more firmly the spiritual verities. We need more prayer. We need the higher patriotism which acknowledges allegiance to the kingdom of Christ. We need a faith in God and in the destiny of the nation which shall remain unshaken in the presence of temporary disaster and defeat. We need to feel that underneath are the Everlasting Arms. And I am perfectly clear that nothing will so quickly and effectively supply these vital needs as a

revival of religion which shall sweep in conquering power over the land and bring multitudes to a saving knowledge of our risen Lord.

We do not need a revival of religious "interest." We do not need a revival of church enthusiasm. We do not need a revival of evangelistic mechanics, but we do need spiritual dynamics—a work of grace of which the Holy Spirit is the author and Pentecost the best illustration.

Do you say that the psychology of the situation scarcely encourages us to expect a widespread revival? Perhaps so, but every one knows that there is an appalling need for it.

Abnormal Conditions a Challenge to the Church

IT is true that our people have come to a new and abnormal life. They are absorbed by the strange and tragic events of the world war. They are following with eager interest the fate of armies and empires. They have imbibed the spirit of militarism which is in the air. The cruelties of our adversaries have shocked them. Parents are consumed with anxiety for the physical and moral safety of their soldier boys. Homes have been closed. Families are scattered. The dramatic events of each passing day are bewildering.

Faith in God is being put to the test. Let us admit that all this has created an atmosphere which may not be altogether favorable to a spiritual propaganda. But do not these conditions challenge the Church to do something startling, and efficient, and *tremendous*?

But you must remember, also, that this very strain and stress really opens the door to spiritual conquest. Human limitations have become so apparent. Human help has so often failed. The need of the divine is so overwhelmingly real. In their dire extremity people are turning to God. Eager petitions fall from lips unaccustomed to pray. Thousands upon thousands are crying out for the first time, "O, that I knew where I might find Him!"

Shall the Church of Jesus Christ respond to the call and adjust itself to the greatest spiritual opportunity of the century? The Church is on trial. We are in danger of losing out. We *shall* lose out unless we move swiftly to provide the human conditions for a widespread, Spirit-wrought revival of religion.

Such a revival *must begin in prayer*. Prayer has always been an essential link in the chain of causes which have produced real revivals. No great spiritual awakening has ever come to the world without it. Said Mr. Finney: "I will say that unless I had the spirit of prayer I could do nothing. If for even one hour I lose the spirit of

supplication I find myself unable to preach with power or win souls by personal conversation." Mr. Caughey said: "You ask the secret of genuine revivals? It is *knee work, knee work, knee work!* Revivals without prayer are wholly superficial. But when the minister and his more spiritual members begin spending hours in prayer something will happen." And something really vital will not happen without it. I am sure I am not overstating the case when I say that the great, crying, tremendous, overwhelming need of the Church and of our country in this hour of its crisis is the dawning of an era of the hunger and habit of intercessory prayer. We need more prayer in the public congregation.

Our regular meetings for prayer must have unusual emphasis. We must give more time to our private devotions. We must spend less time with the daily paper and more in talking with God. Our prayers must take on an agony of desire. We must *wrestle, wrestle, wrestle* until we prevail.

Result of Faithful Preaching

SUCH a revival will be the product of the faithful preaching of the old-fashioned truths of the Book—sin, retribution, repentance, regeneration, the witness of the Spirit and the limitless conquests of

an uttermost salvation. This is no time for ethical platitudes. This is no time for the exploitation of sociological panaceas. This is no time for ecclesiastical veneer. This is no time to tone down the unchangeable truth of God to suit the tastes of a worldly minded, compromising Church. Nor is it the time to declare to lost men anything short of the whole counsel of God. A feeble, apologetic, emasculated message could serve no useful purpose at any time, but how utterly inadequate now!

The people in shadowed homes need spiritual help. The soldiers of an hundred training camps and navy yards need spiritual help. The men at Washington, who are standing under the crushing burdens of official responsibility, need spiritual help. The masses of the American people, looking with feverish anxiety into the unlighted and uncertain days ahead, need spiritual help. *And they must have that help without delay.* Woe unto the messenger who dares, in this strategic hour, to trifle with his responsibility—a responsibility which relates itself to destiny.

In these extraordinary times we must not insist upon any conventional methods of evangelism. The authorities in some places advise that churches be closed during the evenings of the week, in order to conserve fuel and light. The patriotic duties of many of our people will prevent regular attendance upon special meetings,

but where it seems unwise to hold revival *meetings* the community may have a revival just the same. There never was a more favorable time for individual effort. People are hospitable to the personal approach. Many are more than usually thoughtful. Some are standing upon the very threshold of the Kingdom, eagerly waiting for an invitation to become subjects of the King. It is a time of perfectly wonderful evangelistic opportunity.

Moved by a Great Passion

BUT neither the work of mass evangelism nor that of personal evangelism can succeed if it shall be a mere perfunctory matter. How skilful we must be! And how winsome! That winsomeness must have its mainspring in an actual passion for souls. When Jesus beheld the multitude He was *moved*. That means that His heart was fairly melted into tenderness and sympathy and solicitude. We shall not accomplish much until we, too, are *moved*, gripped and dominated and swayed by a mighty passion.

If only a fraction of the great membership of our churches were thus moved and would instantly get into this business of winning souls, what would not happen? How quickly the attention of the nation would be turned to religious concerns!

How the churches would fill up! How the pulpit would catch fire! How the spiritual thermometer would rise! What a stirring among the dry bones! How the careless and sinful would come crowding in multitudes to the centers of evangelistic power! How the light, flashing out from the churches, would radiate into all the avenues of our civilian and military life! And how America would secure the best conceivable preparation for the baptism of fire and blood and death and heart-ache and sorrow that is just ahead!

We are doing great things for the spiritual interests of our soldiers in France. We are making splendid efforts to reach with the message of life our young men in the training camps here. This is well. But what are we doing in a large and efficient way to put heart and hope and the inspirations of Christian faith into the lives of our people at home?

Methodism has been premier among the spiritual and evangelistic forces of this land. *What shall we do in this vastly emergent hour?*

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